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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 001193

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/NCE  
MDA FOR S.WINKIE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CZECH OPPOSITION LEADER PAROUBEK'S  
VISIT TO WASHINGTON

REF: A. PRAGUE 1153

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 1174

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR MICHAEL DODMAN FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Jiri Paroubek, Chairman of the largest Czech opposition party, CSSD or the Czech Social Democratic Party, will visit Washington next week with the primary purpose of discussing missile defense with U.S. policy makers. To win the Czech parliament's approval of the MD agreements, the Topolane government will have to secure some level of support from Paroubek and his CSSD. Although Paroubek has repeatedly expressed his opposition to a Czech MD site, he has always been careful to caveat his position sufficiently so as to leave himself some maneuvering room. His trip to Washington is therefore important because it can arm Paroubek with arguments that could help him justify an eventual shift in his position. END SUMMARY.

#### BACKGROUND ON PAROUBEK AND HIS DELEGATION

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[1](#)2. (C) Paroubek, a former Czech prime minister (2005-2006), is the leader of the strongest party in the opposition, the Czech Social Democrats. He is an ambitious, abrasive politician, who has earned a nickname "Buldozer" for his tough political tactics. Although his party has been at the top in recent public opinion polls, Paroubek has not managed to translate this good news into political capital. He has been under attack in the media for his and his family's less than transparent finances (ref A). The media has also been merciless about his recent divorce and his relationship with the much younger Petra Kovacova. (Note: Kovacova, a professional interpreter, will accompany Paroubek on this trip to Washington. Paroubek has mentioned publicly several times that he and Kovacova will marry in the near future. End Note.) Two of the CSSD deputy chairmen, Bohuslav Sobotka and Zdenek Skromach, have stated publicly that they would consider challenging Paroubek for the chairmanship at the next party congress in 2009. Both have also surpassed Paroubek in terms of popularity with the voters.

[1](#)3. (C) Paroubek's delegation will also include Michal Hasek, a Member of Parliament and Chairman of the CSSD club in the Lower Chamber of the Parliament. Hasek, who is 31, is a CSSD party operative and a Paroubek loyalist. Although he has no direct influence on foreign policy deliberations of the parliament, his position as the CSSD whip and as one of Paroubek's top advisers make him an important interlocutor.

PAROUBEK'S POLITICAL CALCULUS ON MISSILE DEFENSE

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¶4. (C) Paroubek has been consistent in his opposition of the proposed Czech MD site. His opposition is not based on ideology, but rather on opinion polls. With the majority of Czechs opposing the radar, Paroubek can score easy political points by aligning his position with polling results. He has been quite open with us in this regard, frequently justifying his position on MD by referring to the Czech public's opposition to the U.S. proposal. While recent public opinion polls seemed to indicate a decline in the Czechs' negative attitudes to the radar, it is unlikely that we will see a shift in public opinion that would be significant enough to affect Paroubek's position. Rather Paroubek will have to adjust his position on MD in spite of the polls.

¶5. (C) He may do this for a number of reasons. His short-term political ambition of assuming the speaker's chair in the Parliament is one possible reason (ref A). Paroubek himself suggested that he might be willing to make a deal with Topolanek over the Czech EU Presidency and other foreign policy priorities. His long-term ambition is to return to the prime minister's office. Although this means that he has to weigh every key domestic and foreign policy issue very carefully so as not to lose public support, Paroubek is savvy enough to know that good relations with the United States will also be important. This is why he has announced publicly -- and stressed to us privately -- that he would not abrogate the MD agreements if he is elected prime minister in the next election, which is expected in 2010.

¶6. (C) Although Paroubek will be looking to make a political deal with the Topolanek government, he will still have to sell it to his party and to give himself some cover with the voters. Next week's meetings in Washington can help Paroubek

PRAGUE 00001193 002 OF 002

build his case. He has repeatedly indicated to us that the threat will be the key issue for determining his position. Most recently, Paroubek told Ambassador Graber on November 1: "what will be decisive is whether Iran will have ballistic missiles; if so, then we can work with that." However, in his meeting with Defense Secretary Gates, Paroubek cautioned that the evidence would have to be "stronger" than what had been made available on Iraq and its WMD program. Paroubek may also consider the "2 plus 2" proposal of delaying activation of the Czech and Polish sites as helpful. Paroubek's reaction to the media frenzy following Secretary Gates' visit to Prague was relatively muted, a good indication that he was intrigued by the proposal and what it could mean in his own political calculations (ref B).

#### OTHER TOPICS

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¶7. (C) Paroubek will also seek to use the U.S. visit to add some polish to his foreign policy credentials. In addition to MD, he has requested briefings on Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea, and Kosovo. Since the Czech parliament will be debating and voting on the foreign deployments bill, which includes the planned Czech PRT in Logar and the Czech contingent in Kosovo, his discussions with Washington policy-makers on Afghanistan and Kosovo will be helpful (but Paroubek will also work to present his personal view that a settlement on Kosovo should be delayed to avoid offending the Serbs). Paroubek is also looking for ways to build links between his CSSD and the Democratic Party. He therefore welcomed the planned meetings with DNC Chairman Howard Dean and Democratic lawmakers.

#### COMMENT

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¶8. (C) Paroubek has not visited Washington before. He is disappointed that he did not have the chance for an official visit while he was prime minister. As he will no doubt

emphasize, Paroubek considers himself a friend of the United States. In all his meetings, expressions of thanks for Paroubek's work as prime minister in support of Transatlantic priorities will help to further our objectives for this visit.

Graber